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S E C R E T LAGOS 001738

SIPDIS

DEA FOR OC, OI,OID,OEE,OSE,OIE
SECSTATE FOR INL/LP,AF/W
POST FOR DEA RD AND ARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2010

TAGS: PGOV PINR SNAR NI

SUBJECT: NDLEA SAYS IT IS TEMPORARILY SUSPENDING
COOPERATION

REF: LAGOS 01701 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DEA ATTACHE SAM GAYE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (S) In late October, the Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) created a special unit, consisting of 25 agents. The mandate of the new unit was to arrest drug kingpins, according to unit commander-Gadzama who was also the NDLEA's top officer in the currently dormant NDLEA/DEA Joint Task Force.

¶2. (S) On October 28, the unit searched the residence of suspected trafficker Onochie Ikenua in the Maryland section of Lagos. They hit a jackpot. The NDLEA seized 3.2 kilograms of cocaine, three expensive motor vehicles and undetermined amount of cash. The NDLEA also seized several bank records (14 bank accounts), one of which contained a saving deposit balance of two hundred fifty one millions in Nigerian currency (USD 1.9 million). The documents also showed Ikenua with bank accounts in Germany and the UK respectively. A further investigation revealed Ikenua owned 16 registered real estate properties in Nigeria, one valued at USD 10 million.

¶3. (S) On October 31, upon hearing about the arrest, DEA Lagos met NDLEA Chairman Bello lafiaji and requested to assist with the investigation. Bello and his top aides diverted discussion about the arrest. Bello then informed CA Gaye that he was suspending counter narcotics cooperation with DEA until there could be a meeting with President Obasanjo during which Bello could defend his agency's record. Bello claimed that he was taking this task because the U.S. Ambassador and British High Commissioner previously had raised concerns with President Obasanjo about the NDLEA's performance. Bello now complained that the entire NDLEA staff was "demoralized" due to these actions. The meeting was adjourned.

¶4. (S) Ikenua and his vehicles were released. We do not know the full details of his release. Subsequently, the special unit that had effected the arrest was dissolved.

¶5. (S) Ikenua was previously arrested twice and convicted once by the NDLEA under Bello's predecessor. Under Nigerian law, he should not be entitled bail.

¶6. (S) On November 4, DEA Attache wrote a letter to the NDLEA, requesting to participate in the investigation of Ikenua and interview him. According to an NDLEA source, Ikenua was returned to his jail cell because the "Americans" had found out about the arrest and wanted to interview him. In response to the DEA letter, the NDLEA has arranged an interview with the suspect for November 8.

¶7. (S) The Mission will raise Bello's refusal to cooperate with the appropriate GON senior officials.

BROWNE